



Suggestions for Developing SAE Expertise

As a new or inexperienced agriculture teacher, you've probably already learned that time is a precious commodity. With all you have to do, the responsibilities and resources required for SAE programs may seem a bit overwhelming. You are not alone. Even the most experienced teachers have difficulty balancing SAEs with FFA and classroom requirements. That is why some of the nation's most talented agricultural educators have provided the following suggestions to help you manage SAEs. These recommendations are intended to provide a few guidelines that will save time and frustration while helping you create an award-winning SAE program for your agriculture department.

- **Keep it Simple**

When it comes to helping students define their SAE program and goals, remember to keep it simple. If necessary, use exploratory or shadowing projects for students with little or no agricultural experience. Keep in mind that even the most basic projects such as growing a potted plant, have potential. Once students have an SAE project/program, continue to keep it simple. Use a simple grading procedure, require students to turn in record books on schedule, keep your SAE management and visitation predictable and ensure that SAE grades are part of the final grade.

- **Know How to Teach Record Keeping**

Knowing how to teach record keeping for SAE is just as important as using a good record book. Many states offer teacher training programs where experienced teachers train new teachers on using record books and record keeping. In addition, it may be a good idea for you to assist with the state record book contest so that you can see winning examples. Or, maybe a retired agriculture teacher can assist you if you have questions or concerns. Do not hesitate to utilize all resources available to you in this area; it will make your job a lot easier!

- **Know Your Community**

Become involved in all facets of the local community in which you teach; this includes civic clubs, community events, etc. It is also beneficial if you live in that community. By understanding the local community, you'll become aware of what is important and build valuable relationships. Additionally, information gained from community involvement can be used in the classroom and will help you develop your lesson plan. For example, if cotton production is an important part of the local economy, you'll want to teach cotton production and uses of cotton to your students.

- **Maximize Local Resources**

If your program has limited land and financial resources for SAE, maximize other resources such as partnerships with local government agencies or visits to agricultural events to discover SAE

opportunities. For example, a student and advisor in Miami assisted the USDA with studying insect migration in south Florida. This same advisor took students interested in a livestock production SAE to the county/agricultural fair to use it as a teaching tool for planning an SAE around showing a hog or lamb.

- **Meet the Parents/Guardians**

Meeting the parents or guardians can usually be accomplished during SAE visits. But it may also be a good idea to have an open house at the start of the year so that you can better communicate expectations and generate enthusiasm for your program. Another option is to hold monthly parent meetings to keep them updated on chapter activities. With parents/guardians on board, you have a powerful alliance.

- **Personalize SAE**

Set goals and outline requirements that each student must meet in their individual SAE program. Provide students with a copy of the currently recognized proficiency areas, so they can see if and how their SAE might fit. Consider building a photo library of each SAE in your class from your visits and information students provide you. Make sure students are aware of the opportunities available to them.

- **Schedule Regular Visits**

Conducting on-site SAE visits is one of the most important activities you can do as an agriculture teacher. Even though it takes time and practice to become comfortable, the results are obvious. Typically during SAE visits, parents or guardians and/or employers are present giving you an immediate rapport with them and insight into the background and motivations of the student. It also helps them understand your objectives as an agricultural educator and why you are hired on an extended day and year contract. Every student is excited to share their project with you, and your presence shows their project is as important to you as it is to them. Visits allow you to applaud accomplishments and offer suggestions for potential expansions and improvement. It is also a good time to outline expectations, take photos, set goals, create a timetable, share award applications and review record books. Don't be afraid to get your hands dirty and help students with skills and proficiencies required for their SAE, such as ear notching, branding, grooming, livestock selection, etc.

- **Use a Good Record Book**

Record keeping is one of the most valuable lessons gained from SAEs and essential for program success. Utilize a record book that is user-friendly and something students can use on a daily basis. Encourage students to have both a hard copy and digital copy that is updated and backed-up on a regular basis, so no data is lost. Developing good record book habits early makes award applications and grading that much easier. Examples of record keeping systems are located in Section IV of this handbook. You can also contact your state office to see what they recommend.

- **Utilize Mentors**

Do not hesitate to have a fellow agriculture teacher with more experience act as a mentor to provide SAE assistance. Agriculture teachers learn by working with other agriculture teachers. State agriculture teacher associations and the National FFA often have workshops on applications, record books and other important topics. These presentations are given by teachers/individuals who understand the process and believe in SAE development and success. Some of the best "tools of the trade" are those shared by others in your profession.